10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

among different tribes. In many of the more civilized sections they are no longer carefully observed. Christians do not resort to them.

Sex irregularities are believed to be most abhorrent to the *bgha* and are reputed to have been the cause of most trouble. Among the Bwès they are considered to cause the drying up of land and the failure of crops, and are therefore most severely punished by the elders when discovered. In their primitive state the Karens were unusually free from fornication and adultery. The recent transition period, with the breaking down of old customs and before Western ideals have been established, has seen some relaxation of these conditions.

The old epic song about *Ywa*, the Father God and Creator, and this belief in the existence of God are found among all the tribes. It does not, however, play an important part in their daily lives which are taken up with their struggles with the ever-present *nats* and demons.

Those Karens who were in closest contact with the Burmans, as for example the Pwo Karens, took on a thin veneer of Buddhism and went to the pagodas at the full moon and the quarters, but as a rule it was largely a social conforming that did not have a deep spiritual content.

VI

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Karen is an agglutinated monosyllabic language belonging to the Sinic family of languages. Like the Chinese it has tones which are important in learning to speak it, for the same sound may have entirely different

10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

615 bathe in the *longyi* then draw a dry one over the wet one which they drop down underneath, thus making the change publicly but modestly without exposing the person. The wet garment is then soused in water and the laundry work is done.

VIII

INTELLECTUAL CHARACTERISTICS

181 156 771 152 The Karens, as was said of the people of Borneo, "are not inferior but different". In their primitive state they were subject to the slavery of fear which had retarded their development. To them as to most primitive races all that is unknown is to be feared. They peopled, with all kinds of malevolent demons, the hills, the streams and the big trees, especially the banyan which is held in awe throughout the Orient probably because of its great fertility and tenacious hold on life. They were surrounded by fierce wild animals and more numerous and powerful neighbours. One of their own number aptly described his race as one that "is capable of being afraid".

This timidity has often militated against them. Because of fear they dare not speak their mind. They resort to the common "don't know" and thus hope to escape attention. They are easily thrown into a panic which disorganizes their thinking and makes them ridiculous when under the cross fire of examination or in a crisis. School-boys will not assert themselves and are often adjudged stupid when in reality they have done better daily work while plodding along than their more vocal fellows. Women are especially shy and in primitive villages will run from a stranger.

The generations through which they have been

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

CHAPTER XXI

RELIGIOUS CONCEPTIONS

The Three Conceptions

771 778 Among the Karen we find traces of three distinct religious conceptions, which have left their impress upon the people. The principle underlying the most primitive religious ideas is that of an impersonal power or force residing both in men and things, but which is all-pervasive, invisible except as it betrays itself by its effect on certain things, and invincible in that it can only be overcome in a particular person or thing by a more powerful manifestation of itself in some other object.[1] The Karen designate this force "pgho." It is the equivalent of what the Melanesians know as "mana" and is defined in the *Karen Thesaurus* as a certain more or less unknown force believed to be all about and which can not be overcome.[2] It may reside in certain individuals who, by its aid, are enabled to accompliah unusual tasks. It can be imparted to objects which, by its power, become charms potent for good or ill. The deities are said to possess "pgho" and on that account to be able to do wonderful things. It is also spoken of by the people as revealing itself in the infinite attributes of "Y'wa," the eternal God, but this is, of course, an adaptation to Christian teachings. However, it is in the realm of the magic, rather than in that of religion, that this power is particularly exploited. Those who are able to perform magical deeds are called "pgha a pgho," that is, persons of "pgho." [3]

776 The second religious conception attained by the Karen was the animistic. They entered upon this stage of religious belief when they began to assign personal attributes to the various powers about them, conceiving of every unknown force as a more or less distinct personality. Thus, they personified the vegetative force in the crops as the goddess "Hpi Bi Yaw;" they conceived of the agency that brought the dry and rainy seasons (the monsoon in reality, of course,) as two different demons, each ruling in the upper air dur-

[1] This view was first brought to the attention of scholars by Bishop R. H. Codrington in his work, *The Melanesians*, pp. 227 ff. Compare also *J. E. Carpenter, Comparative Religion*, pp. 80, ff. for a brief but full discussion of the subject.

[2] The *Karen Thesaurus*, old ed., Vol. III, p. 489.

[3] In speaking of the attributes of "Y'wa" the people say: "Y'wa a pgho a pkhaw." The use of the couplet gives a more finished form of speech.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

ing a period of six months to the exclusion of the other; they assigned a lord ("k' sa") to every mountain and river, and they invested every utensil and object about the house and the animals out-of-doors with separate ghosts ("k'las"). Some of these imaginary beings are beneficent, such as the "Mü xa" or celestial spirits that preside over births; but most of them are malevolent and have to be appeased by continual offerings, sacrifices, and tabus. To keep on good terms with these innumerable spirits consumes a large part of the time and thought of the Karen.[4]

The third conception in the religious traditions of the people is embodied in the "Y'wa" legend, which tells of the placing of the first parents in the garden by "Y'wa," the Creator; their temptation to eat of the forbidden fruit by a serpent or dragon, etc. This story so closely resembles that of the ancient Hebrews, as also certain western Asiatic traditions, that one finds it difficult not to believe that all these traditions somehow had a common origin. Were the "Y'wa" legend marked by distinctive features, we might regard it as one exhibiting only a general resemblance to other traditions extant in other parts of the world, but its parallelism with the account in Genesis precludes this view of the case.[5]

At any rate, the "Y'wa" legend has exercised a strong influence upon the Karen people. To be sure, it did not supplant the ancient animism of the tribes any more than Buddhism has displaced spirit worship among the Burmese. Nevertheless, it was accompanied by the prophesy of the return of the white brother with the Lost Book, which inspired the Karen with the hope of a better future and furnished an admirable foundation on which Christian teachers could build in promoting the development of the Karen nation which, during the last hundred years—the period not only of Christian missions but also of the British conquest and administration of Burma—has been truly remarkable.

The "Y'wa" Tradition

The contrast between the animistic and the "Y'wa" conception of the creation of the world is illustrated in the lines of the following "hta" or poem:

> "When first the earth was made,
> Who worked and built it?
> When it was first formed,
> Who was the creator?"

[4] See Chapter XXII on Supernatural and Mythical Beings, p. 223.
[5] See pp. 10-12.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

As certain "na" dwell in the water, persons who go in bathing must take care not to offend them. Otherwise, the bathers are liable to sudden illness. 776

A monster called "T'nu" appears destined to play the part of destroying angel among the Karen after the righteous shall have disappeared from the earth. He will then exterminate the wicked. He is represented as going about with a huge crossbow.

There is a race of giants, known as "Daw t'ka," who, like the "Ta na," feed on the "k'las" of mortals. They are greatly feared by the Karen, especially in Siam where the people refuse to send their children to school in the neighboring district of Moulmein, lest these spirit-eating giants may devour them.

In the Shwegyin district "Ta t' hkaw hkaw" (the one-legged one) is a demon with the form of a female with but one leg on which she hops along the jungle paths, occasionally falling over. If one answers her call for help and assists her to arise, her ill-temper causes her to give no other acknowledgment of the service than a slap in the face of him who renders it. The Brecs offer the alleged bones of this creature for sale to the women of other tribes, who prize them greatly as charms.

From the foregoing account it will be readily seen that the life of the Karen has been dominated by superstitious beliefs in unseen and malicious powers, which seem to be always in waiting to take offense and do some harm to his crops, his family, or himself. In the succeeding chapter his efforts to propitiate and keep on good terms with these myriad demons are set forth. 771

19; Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

CHAPTER XXIII

PROPITIATORY SACRIFICES AND HEALING OFFERINGS

782 771 The rites and sacrifices of the Karen people seem almost innumerable. As we have seen elsewhere, their offerings are designed to placate the evil powers and win the favor of the good. It is difficult to discover the exact meaning of the numerous ceremonies; for the people are reticent about them, fearing that the demons may overhear and learn their motives or other matters connected with the rites that may anger them. Often persons who are performing some ceremony do not pretend to know its meaning, frankly admitting that they do not understand but are simply following the customs of the elders. Offerings that seem nearly alike to the foreign resident in Burma have their special significance for the Karen, being made to different demons, or at special times, or as preventives, cures, etc. The religion of the Karen is not one of love and worship, but largely of fear of the occult powers by which they believe themselves to be surrounded. Their ceremonies and offerings are, therefore, inspired by personal and utilitarian motives, namely, to avert danger and bring good fortune. Hence, it is not uncommon for the ritualist to make his offering not to a single demon but to "all you evil spirits." Since the "k'la" or life principle of human beings is supposed to be the normal food of these spirits, sickness is to be avoided or cured by offerings of the most savory foods, drink, and other things that may tempt the hungry demon from the person whose shade it is trying to devour.

782 For convenience we may divide the propitiatory ceremonies into three classes. One group comprises those acts of homage, sometimes elaborate, in which the demons are invoked with sacrifices and rites, as in the case of the offerings to the lords of the land and water ("Hti k' kaw k' sa"), to the "Mū xa," and to the "Bgha" of the particular family. The second group consists of the rites used in placating evil demons who may be feeding upon the "k' la" of a sick person. These take the form of offerings and appeals to the wandering shade to return to its proper abode. The third group is that in which the offerings are made to the shade

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

I remember being asked by a family, who had become Christians and were discarding the old ways, to destroy these utensils for them. They had not yet freed themselves of their fears sufficiently to perform an act that seemed to them like desecration.

Families who are about to adopt Burmese customs or to accept Christianity, generally dispose of all their pigs and fowls, with the

UTENSILS FOR THE SACRED "BGHA" FEAST OF A PWO KAREN FAMILY, BASSEIN DISTRICT.

exception of two or three of the latter and one of the former. When the time for a feast arrives, they make the usual preparations; but before the pig is killed, one of the elders will put his hand on its side and inform the "Mū xa" that the family are about to make their last offering and beg the demons to dismiss them and allow them to go in peace. This rite is called "Ta aw-k' tew kwi Bgha" literally, "eating to finish the 'Bgha'." The statement that this is the final offering is repeated in every address to the spirit uttered during the course of the feast. If the parents of the head of the family are living, they construct a little house and put into it offer-

19: Marshall M-6 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

177
771
796

ings of rice and meat in order to satisfy the appetite of the "Bgha." Families who thus terminate their relations with their special divinities, observe the tabu of not keeping pigs and fowls again for a period of three years. Not all families who become Christians observe this rite, for many times they make the transition by simply forsaking the "Bgha" once for all.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

of between six and seven thousand persons. The future development of this movement will be watched with interest for, under the direction of a few trained preachers and others, it affords an excellent opportunity for the Karen to show what they can accomplish in the way of religious progress by themselves.

If they can maintain their ideals, administer the affairs and discipline of their church, and increase its membership, while continuing friendly relations with other Christian bodies in Burma, they will be worthy of all praise.

Contemporaneous with the founding of the independent church by Ko San Ye, a former priest of the Church of England started the "Hkli Bo Pa" cult in the Toungoo Hills, basing his preaching on a misapprehension of a passage of Scripture. He has instituted a form of worship with peculiar practices, has been excommunicated from the Anglican body, and has since been carrying on his labors with only indifferent success.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

CHAPTER XXVI

MAGIC

The division lines between religion, magic, and science, as these matters appear to primitive peoples, are hard to trace. In truth, the three fields so overlap and interpenetrate that it is almost impossible to tell where one begins and the other leaves off. However, religion for them may be defined as consisting of the socially recognized practices and conceptions belonging to the tribe or group and relating to the supernatural powers or forces. Through their conceptions and practices the people try to enter into relation with these powers for their own welfare. Magic may be defined as the art of influencing the action of spirits and occult powers for the purpose of serving private ends. This art may involve resorting to secret and sinister means for an anti-social purpose. As many, if not most, of the magical rites are concerned with matters of health, the realm of magic includes a portion of that of science, especially of medical science, which makes use of the effects of roots, herbs, and minerals on the human body, as well as of other treatments, which form the beginning of a real scientific knowledge.

The underlying principle of Karen magic seems to be the "pgho," that all-pervasive impersonal power which is so potent for good or ill. By observing certain ceremonies and incantations the individual is thought to be able to induce the "pgho" to take up its abode in some person or object and have it accomplish the end he has in view.

The belief in the power of magic doubtless grew out of incidental observation and primitive experimentation with the unseen forces surrounding all human life, in which coincidence of events was ignorantly seized upon as establishing a necessary connection between them. That the magical power of an alleged charm rests on very insecure foundations is illustrated in an experience which I had with a Karen, who brought me two magical stones about the color and size of horse-chestnuts to be tested. The Karen had inherited these stones, which had long been regarded in his family as charms against injury by weapons. He wanted me to fire my

31; Scherman--30 E-4 (no date) 1915 AP1 Burma

101 [797] embraced Buddhism and more especially Christianity. Many of them [i.e. Karen, Analyst] have Karen AP7 The American Baptist Mission has been most successful among them and draws trainees for the missionary and teaching profession from the Karen. In the distant hill districts the tribes can still be found in their original civilization. There they still build their crude bamboo [342] huts, often one for several families (21). The

21. Ferrars, ibid., p. 149.

Karenni (meaning red Karen) who live beyond the British administration zone, but still under British control, live together with a few kindred tribes in a separate little state in the southeast corner of the Southern Shan States--1911: 19,008. They are, without question, least touched by civilization. Christianity has won [771] over only a few converts among them; the demon cult is still the predominant religion. The tall 361 masts, which are erected at sowing and harvesting [782] time as sacrificial posts for the spirits, indicate from afar the proximity of a Karenni village. A sturdy fence of bamboo wickerwork usually encloses the village itself, and most of the time /Figure 6--Interior of a Taungyo house in Myinka, near Kalaw./ the individual houses are also fenced in (Plate VII, 1). The grain sheds, which 343 are small pile structures, stand some distance away, usually outside the village fence because of fire hazard. This is a custom which can be observed among all Indochinese mountain tribes. This practice is all the more surprising since in the days when raids, robberies, and tribal feuds were very frequent just the most valuable possessions were kept outside the fort-like village enclosures. The grain sheds were secured only by a wooden bar and were accessible to everybody; it was even customary to keep also other valuable 343 possessions in these huts. However, the grain shed 778 seems to have been revered as holy; it is said that